

109# P-288C



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Safety Recommendation

Date: September 9, 1987

In reply refer to: P-87-28

Honorable Elizabeth H. Dole
Secretary
Department of Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20590

About 4:20 a.m. on July 8, 1986, line 2N, an 8-inch products pipeline operated by Williams Pipe Line Company at Mounds View, Minnesota, ruptured. Unleaded gasoline under 1,434 psig spewed from a 7 1/2-foot-long opening along the longitudinal seam of the pipe. Vaporized gasoline combined with air and liquid gasoline flowed along neighborhood streets. About 20 minutes later, the gasoline vapor was ignited when an automobile entered the area. Following an explosion-like noise, fire spread rapidly along the path of the liquid gasoline. Two persons were burned severely and later died, and one person suffered serious burns. There was substantial property damage and soil and water pollution. 1/

At present, Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS) must depend on voluntary compliance with the Federal regulations to ensure the safety of the public from pipeline accidents. There simply are not enough pipeline investigators to effectively inspect every operator annually and to perform their other duties. To perform inspections of each operator in the central region each year would require 272 inspection days, 47 days more than the approximately 225 inspection days the central region had available. (The number of available inspection days was determined based on two inspectors devoting 50 percent of their time.) If the "mere presence" of OPS is to have the effect of encouraging operators to comply with the pipeline safety regulations, then its efforts need to call more attention to its presence. Therefore, its efforts must motivate compliance by operators with the pipeline safety regulations.

While a change in OPS' enforcement policy is necessary, that alone will not correct all the problems with the enforcement program. To adequately protect public safety, OPS staffing needs to be augmented. At the time of the accident at Mounds View, the OPS had only 16 inspectors nationwide. In the central region, which has complete responsibility for the WPL pipeline system, there were two inspectors available to inspect 113 interstate pipeline operators and to monitor the intrastate pipeline safety inspection and enforcement program for 10 States.

1/ For more detailed information, read Pipeline Accident Report—"Williams Pipe Line Company Liquid Pipeline Rupture and Fire, Mounds View, Minnesota, July 8, 1986" (NTSB/PAR-87/02).

The Safety Board believes this number of inspectors is insufficient to allow thorough, periodic reviews of each operator. Additionally, just performing the initial review would allow no time for analyses of the various operators' performances to determine which ones require comprehensive monitoring, to actually perform any comprehensive monitoring, to participate in investigations of accidents and incidents, or to respond to public reports of potentially unsafe conditions.

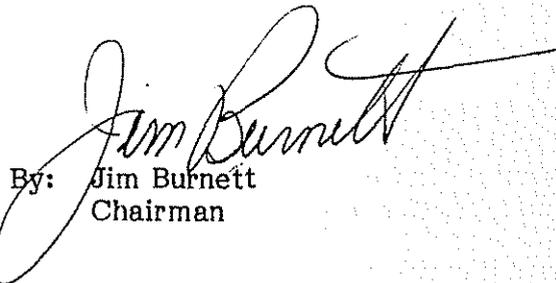
Considering that only 11 States now serve as agents for the OPS in inspecting interstate natural gas pipelines, finding ways to obtain similar status for the other States would greatly expand the number of inspectors available to the OPS. Similarly, consideration should be given to providing inspection powers to the States for interstate liquid pipeline operations.

Therefore, as a result of its investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Department of Transportation:

Increase, through the use of State inspection personnel and by increasing the number of Office of Pipeline Safety (OPS) inspectors, the OPS pipeline inspection capability sufficient to perform thorough, periodic safety reviews of all pipeline operations directly subject to OPS monitoring and to perform timely, effective, followup compliance reviews of those operations in which compliance deficiencies are identified. (Class II, Priority Action) (P-87-28)

Also, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendations P-87-13 through -19 to the Williams Pipe Line Company, P-87-20 to the American Petroleum Institute, and P-87-21 through -27 to the Office of Pipeline Safety. The Board reiterated Safety Recommendation P-84-26 to the Research and Special Programs Administration.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and LAUBER, NALL, and KOLSTAD, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman